

THE SILENT FLUTE

.....AN ORIGINAL STORY
(Registered)

....by BRUCE LEE

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION:

THREE SWORDSMEN SAT DOWN AT A TABLE IN A CROWDED INN AND BEGAN TO MAKE LOUD COMMENTS ABOUT THEIR NEIGHBOR, HOPING TO GOAD HIM INTO A DUEL. THE MASTER SEEMED TO TAKE NO NOTICE OF THEM, BUT WHEN THEIR REMARKS BECAME RUDER AND MORE POINTED, HE RAISED HIS CHOPSTICKS AND, IN QUICK SNIPS, EFFORTLESSLY CAUGHT FOUR FLIES ON THE WING. AS HE SLOWLY LAID DOWN THE CHOPSTICKS, THE THREE SWORDSMEN HURRIEDLY LEFT THE ROOM.

THE STORY ILLUSTRATES A GREAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ORIENTAL AND WESTERN THINKING. THE AVERAGE WESTERNER WOULD BE INTRIGUED WITH SOMEONE'S ABILITY TO CATCH FLIES WITH CHOPSTICKS, AND WOULD PROBABLY SAY IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HOW GOOD HE IS IN A FIGHT. THE ORIENTAL WOULD REALIZE THAT A MAN WHO HAS ATTAINED SUCH COMPLETE MASTERY OF AN ART REVEALS HIS PRESENCE OF MIND IN EVERY ACTION. THE STATE OF WHOLENESS AND IMPERTURBABILITY DEMONSTRATED BY THE MASTER INDICATED HIS MASTERY OF SELF.

AND SO IT IS WITH MARTIAL ARTS.
TO THE WESTERNER THE FINGER JABS,
THE SIDE KICKS, THE BACK FIST, ETC.,
ARE TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION AND VIOLENCE
WHICH IS, INDEED, ONE OF THEIR FUNCTIONS.
BUT THE ORIENTAL BELIEVES THAT THE
PRIMARY FUNCTION OF SUCH TOOLS IS
REVEALED WHEN THEY ARE SELF DIRECTED
AND DESTROY GREED, FEAR, ANGER AND
POLLY.

MANIPULATIVE SKILL IS NOT THE ORIENTAL'S
GOAL. HE IS AIMING HIS KICKS AND BLOWS
AT HIMSELF AND WHEN SUCCESSFUL, MAY EVEN
SUCCEED IN KNOCKING HIMSELF OUT. AFTER
YEARS OF TRAINING, HE HOPES TO ACHIEVE
THAT VITAL LOOSENING AND EQUABILITY OF
ALL POWERS WHICH IS WHAT THE THREE
SWORDSMEN SAW IN THE MASTER.

IN EVERYDAY LIFE THE MIND IS CAPABLE OF
MOVING FROM ONE THOUGHT OR OBJECT TO
ANOTHER---"BEING" MIND INSTEAD OF "HAVING"
MIND. HOWEVER, WHEN FACE TO FACE WITH
AN OPPONENT IN A DEADLY CONTEST, THE
MIND TENDS TO STICK AND LOSES ITS
MOBILITY. STICKABILITY OR STOPPAGE
IS A PROBLEM THAT HAUNTS EVERY MARTIAL
ARTIST.

KWAN-IN (AVALOKITESVARA), THE GODDESS OF MERCY, IS SOMETIMES REPRESENTED WITH ONE THOUSAND ARMS, EACH HOLDING A DIFFERENT INSTRUMENT. IF HER MIND STOPS WITH THE USE, FOR INSTANCE, OF A SPEAR, ALL THE OTHER ARMS (999) WILL BE OF NO USE WHATEVER. IT IS ONLY BECAUSE OF HER MIND NOT STOPPING WITH THE USE OF ONE ARM BUT MOVING FROM ONE INSTRUMENT TO ANOTHER THAT ALL HER ARMS PROVE USEFUL WITH THE UTMOST DEGREE OF EFFICENCY. THUS THE FIGURE IS MEANT TO DEMONSTRATE THAT, WHEN THE ULTIMATE TRUTH IS REALIZED, EVEN AS MANY AS ONE THOUSAND ARMS ON ONE BODY MAY EACH BE SERVICEABLE IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

"PURPOSELESSNESS", "EMPTY-MINDEDNESS" OR "NO ART" ARE FREQUENT TERMS USED IN THE ORIENT TO DENOTE THE ULTIMATE ACHIEVEMENT OF A MARTIAL ARTIST. ACCORDING TO ZEN, THE SPIRIT IS BY NATURE FORMLESS AND NO "OBJECTS" ARE TO BE HARBORED IN IT. WHEN ANYTHING IS HARBORED THERE, PSYCHIC ENERGY IS DRAWN TOWARD IT, AND WHEN PSYCHIC ENERGY LOSES ITS BALANCE, ITS NATIVE ACTIVITY BECOMES CRAMPED AND IT NO LONGER FLOWS WITH THE STREAM. WHERE THE ENERGY IS TIPPED, THERE IS TOO MUCH

(4)

OF IT IN ONE DIRECTION AND A SHORTAGE
OF IT IN ANOTHER DIRECTION. WHERE
THERE IS TOO MUCH ENERGY, IT OVERFLOWS
AND CANNOT BE CONTROLLED. IN EITHER
CASE, IT IS UNABLE TO COPE WITH EVER-
CHANGING SITUATIONS. BUT WHEN THERE
PREVAILS A STATE OF "PURPOSELESSNESS"
(WHICH IS ALSO A STATE OF FLUIDITY OR
MINDLESSNESS), THE SPIRIT HARBORS
NOTHING IN IT, NOR IS IT TIPPED IN
ONE DIRECTION; IT TRANSCENDS BOTH
SUBJECT AND OBJECT: IT RESPONDS
EMPTY-MINDEDLY TO WHATEVER IS
HAPPENING.

TRUE MASTERY TRANSCENDS ANY PARTICULAR
ART. IT STEMS FROM MASTERY OF ONESELF
---THE ABILITY, DEVELOPED THROUGH SELF-
DISCIPLINE, TO BE CALM, FULLY AWARE,
AND COMPLETELY IN TUNE WITH ONESELF
AND THE SURROUNDINGS. THEN, AND ONLY
THEN, CAN A PERSON KNOW HIMSELF.

----BRUCE LEE

"THE BOOK" :

"The Book", the bible of martial art, supposedly contains all the inner secret doctrines of hand-to-hand combat. Every five years a contest is held to select the "Keeper of The Book." In the end, it turns out to be a book with blank pages with nothing on them except a small reflecting mirror. After all, you are buddha, you are "it."

THE MAN
(Coburn):

A martial art die-hard who makes martial art a goal rather than a process, an end rather than a means. He lives martial art, he breathes martial art. He swears to obtain "The Book" and becomes the best martial artist. This story is about his inner journey to his reunion with his own soul. From the first encounter with Ah Sahm, the blind man, to the duel with the rhythm man, the obtaining of "The Book" and his final fatal battle with the blind man that climaxes his enlightenment.

AH SAHM:

A blind man who can feel where normal people.. cannot see. An enlightened man who has transcended martial art and is at one with nature. In the story, he is the mirror that reflects the soul of the man.

RHYTHM MAN:

A skillful master of martial art. He has rhythm in broken rhythm and vice versa. His explosive emotions and his dependence on external musical instruments for turning on eventually lead to his defeat.

YAMAGUCHI:

The Keeper of "The Book." He is the man to beat. Nobody seems to know who he is or what style he practices. It turns out that he is a plain gardener who seems to have forgotten martial art. He is in martial art, but not of it.

In the awakening purple flush of dawn, barely visible in the distance, the small image of a man is ascending the misty mountain. Finally he reaches the top. He stands there, a lone silhouette. Suddenly, the silence of the morning is punctuated with the humble sound of one distant flute. Almost at the same time, as the sun rises like a great slow bubble of air through water toward a higher skin of surface, we see one man standing on one peak, and another sitting on a still higher one, playing his flute. The increasing light, and a closer glimpse, reveals the identity of the standing man, James COBURN. He is looking at the man that is sitting on the higher peak and there is a determined look on his face. As he descends the peak, we jump back in time, revealing the events leading up to THIS MOMENT.

* * * * *

The gigantic hall of the interior of a temple. At the center two men are sparring, one wears a red robe, the other a yellow one. There are four side judges and a referee presiding. Facing each other sitting in two separate rows are experts from the yellow robe and the red robe schools of martial art. Two elderly monks, one dressed in red, the other in yellow, are sitting motionless on an altar. Sitting between these two monks is the head monk, a wise old man. He is dressed in a red and yellow robe. This event is to choose a champion among the yellow and red robe of the Buddhist sect of martial art. The Champion will then become the representative of the Buddhist

sect to contest for keeper of "The Book," the bible and highest secret of martial art. The present keeper is YAMAGUCHI.

Finally, the yellow robe contestant scores the deciding point and both contestant return to their own individual group. There is a brief silence and then the referee calls out the final championship bout between James COBURN, a red robe, and the yellow robe contestant seen in the previous bout.

COBURN bows to his opponent and the bout begins. The unorthodox bouncing around of his opponent creates some problem for COBURN and he is having difficulty catching up with his opponent. Finally, he succeeds in scoring a point; however, as the contest resumes, his opponent's elusiveness is becoming a factor. COBURN is both annoyed and frustrated and his emotions show in his technique. The opponent suddenly charges, and instead of the usual classical retreat, COBURN steps in with a stop punch knocking his opponent out cold. COBURN is being revived to be crowned as champion and representative of the Buddhist sect for the upcoming all-important contest for the keeper of "The Book."

COBURN is summoned to the altar. The old red robe monk declares that he is suspended indefinitely. Sensing COBURN'S displeasure, the wise head monk says:

"You feel that in real life you would have won, for the opponent is knocked unconscious. Well, you are right, partly right. Unfortunately, you

can only use your punch to knock out your
opponent, but your fist has yet to knock
yourself out. You are no match for YAMAGUCHI,
the keeper of "The Book."

COBURN is puzzled but he cannot comprehend what the head monk
means. He bows and leaves.

* * * * *

COBURN is on the road.. His personal belongings are all
wrapped in a red-cloth tied to his back. He passes by a forest,
and having surveyed the area, he sets up camp and begins to
train. We can see the beard begins to grow on COBURN, indicating
some length of time of training.

One day while he trains, he suddenly is aware that
someone is watching. He quickly turns around and sees a man
sitting who almost blends in with the bushes around him. As
COBURN approaches the man, he sees that he is blind, a Chinese
in his late twenties. Without turning, the blind man comments
that COBURN is working out hard. COBURN complains to him
about his circumstances and the blind man listens silently.
He vows that he will some day own "The Book" and be the best
martial art man. COBURN then finds out that the blind man
is a masseur by trade, and a flute player by hobby. His name
is AH SAHM and he has set up camp nearby for his annual retreat.
COBURN invites the blind man to move in with him and asks him
if he would massage him after his daily training, and AH SAHM
gladly obliges.

* * * * *

We see COBURN is practicing a classical form of the red robe style. He is dynamic but static and mechanical. Suddenly the rhythm of the flute is heard and COBURN'S movement also takes on a more fluid flow. He is more alive in expressing his movement in tune with the music. He is really in with it and man and music merge into one.

* * * * *

The day is coming to a close and AH SAHM is seen massaging COBURN.

* * * * *

Next scene COBURN is seen meditating under a small waterfall. He is straining. The rhythm of the flute is again heard. COBURN steps out of the waterfall. He follows the sound and walks into the wood. Suddenly the flute stops and the blind man is seen cleaning his flute. COBURN turns and stops as he becomes aware of the sound of birds chirping, the gentle breeze of wind - the quiet sound of nature. The loud sound of the waterfall is vaguely heard in the background. Soon AH SAHM resumes his flute playing, and the birds in nearby trees begin to join in the melody. Some of them fly near AH SAHM and one of them rests on the flute. AH SAHM'S flute and the chirping of the birds merge into one. COBURN is fascinated.

* * * * *

One day while training COBURN becomes aware that the flute is not playing. When he goes to look for AH SAHM, the blind man has left just as he has appeared, suddenly and quickly. COBURN will miss him, but he has to go back to his training.

* * * * *

Somewhere in a desert a temporary tent is set up. People arrive by horses, camels, etc. We learn that this is a Zen Art Convention where representatives from all different styles of art meet. Entrances are marked, instructors and students. As each enters, a man announces who and what styles the person represents. As COBURN enters and being announced, we see reactions of those already present; red robe and yellow robe representatives.

As more and more instructors enter, we find that all of them bear some air of rigid dignity and typical composure of guests is the rhythm man, a long-hair man and definitely an unconventional martial artist. He is Chinese, in his twenties. He came in escorted by several attractive girls of various nationalities (his concubines) plus several musicians. Following him is a group of hangers-on. He does not wait to be announced and walks straight in with his group.

* * * * *

COBURN is seen observing various masters perform, some martial artists, some musicians, some singers, etc. During the wandering around in the convention, he suddenly finds a lady dancer's performance extremely interesting. Her movement is ever fluid and her spirit ever present. As soon as one movement ends, it begins to melt and flow into another one. COBURN is observing intensely but can find no loopholes, psychologically or physically, for his scheming attacks if he were in combat with this beautiful lady dancer. As he watches closely, COBURN thinks he finds a gap, but as he involuntarily jerks his hand, the dancer turns and smiles at him, melting his anxious anticipation.

* * * * *

After showing the various form of martial art from COBURN'S point of view, we hear a slight commotion and one of the rhythm man's followers is arguing with another student of martial art. The rhythm man's follower claims that most martial art has no life in it, a mere sterile pattern. Finally, the other students' instructor joins in with the argument. The instructor begins to make rude statements. Rhythm man told him that there is only one man alive that can talk to him like that and that man is YAMAGUCHI because he has the knowledge of "The Book." The instructor demands a match to prove him so. Rhythm man gladly obliges and turns and smiles to his accompanying musicians.

FIRST MATCH: Rhythm man faces opponent. They bow and opponent immediately gets into his ready stance. Rhythm man just stands there and stares at his opponent. Suddenly, drum beat is heard; his musicians begin to play the music. The rhythm man comes alive and moves in tune with the music. His opponent is puzzled. We will intercut frequently here with the seriousness of attention of Observer on the rhythm man, especially COBURN. Rhythm man's concubines sigh and giggle at his coolness. Suddenly, the music stops and rhythm man immediately launches a thundering combination of attacks, the snapping sound of kicks and punches breaks the silence. His opponent's mental concentration is broken and he is subdued.

SECOND FIGHT: No sooner has the first man gone on defeat, than a second man appears. They bow, and his opponent quickly sneaks in with a combination of attacks, hoping to take advantage of rhythm man. As rhythm man agilely stops the initial attack, the music once more resumes. The attacker is hopelessly drawn into rhythm man's cadence and chasing him with futile but strong technique. The rhythm man just passively evades and dances away from his opponent's thrusts and kicks. The rhythm man is really in with the scene and dances all over the place. Finally, tired of toying with his frustrated opponent, the rhythm man switches into devastating attacks. In expert manner he defeats his opponent.

Rhythm man is really getting warmed up by all this. COBURN wants to test his skill as he is fascinated by the

rhythm man. So the match is on.

The match begins - they are pretty evenly matched. However, the drum beat begins to disturb COBURN'S concentration and the rhythm man is coming on strong. (NOTE: We can do this by the drum beat that can forecast COBURN'S intention of attack, thus making COBURN extremely conscious). COBURN is being pressed hard, losing his balance several times. COBURN is on the verge of defeat. Suddenly a sharp penetrating sound is heard. We pan to a corner and see that AH SAHM, the blind man, is playing the flute.

The soothing sound begins to change COBURN'S attitude from anxiety to gradual ease of tension. At this instant, background begins to fade out, with only interest of close-ups of AH SAHM and the drum man, COBURN and rhythm man. The flute sometimes dominates and vice versa. COBURN is getting more and more cool, and rhythm man is cutting up his motion, until finally to a complete standstill. The two combatants just stand there staring at each other while the combat of flute and drum goes on. Suddenly, rhythm man attacks, but quick as a flash, COBURN intercepts and the rhythm man is down! All music comes to a sudden stop as rhythm man bounces up as quickly as he can, bows and leaves the hall, with the musicians and concubines following him. His other followers, seeing their idol beaten, are angry at the blind man's intervention. They quickly gang up on him. As COBURN comes to the blind man's rescue, two of the men fly and land in front of him. COBURN

then realizes that the blind man not only is a master flute player but a martial artist as well. AH SAHM is being surrounded, but the attackers cannot penetrate his sensitive aura of defense. One of the attackers picks up some sort of instrument that was left behind and begins to make loud sounds on it. The level of sound rises and COBURN is watching closely ready to come in to help. However, in the midst of sound, the blind man awkwardly picks up the rhythm and begins to move with it, much like the rhythm man, except for lack of grace. Then in unison with the sound, he knocks off the attackers one by one. Finally, the man that is making all the noise is the only one left. He stops and stares at the now motionless blind man and with a shudder, he flees.

* * * * *

Seven contestants arrive at the house of YAMAGUCHI.

(NOTE: There will be two or three additional musicians accompanying rhythm man). It is a house that has sophisticated simplicity with a beautiful but simple Zen garden. A gardener is seen working; he, too, has the wooden look of a simpleton. However, he breaks into a warm smile when he sees the guests. Two young boys greet the contestants as they enter the house. The boys lead them into a waiting room. As they wait, we can see some familiar faces: COBURN, the rhythm man, the representative of the Buddhist sect, and a few others that we have not seen. ~~Pretty~~ Soon, tea is served. As they sit there, silently drinking the tea, the two boys appear again. They invite the guests to enter the training hall, but before doing so, the boys announces that his master has asked three of the seven contestants to return for further training for the next contest five years from now, as they are really not up to that level as yet. The representative of the Buddhist sect is among the rejected. The three contestants leave while the remaining four (plus rhythm man's musicians) enter another waiting room just outside the training hall with only a curtain separating them from the contest ground. The four are rhythm man, COBURN and two others. They sit there again silently while the two boys leave.

The boys return again and one of the contestants is asked to pass the curtain into the training hall. Soon loud screams are heard and then silence again. Then we see a rejected

contestant walk out and leave without saying a word. The two boys are out again and another contestant is requested. This time we hear only explosive snaps of thrusts and kicks. Again there is a silence and then talking is heard, but we cannot distinguish cue to the distance., Then the contestant walks out backward and he passes the curtain, he gives a deep bow and then leaves.

Rhythm is next and he enters with his musicians. Soon the music starts, but only briefly, as it comes to an abrupt stop. Then talking is heard again vaguely, but as the voice approach the curtain, we can hear YAMAGUCHI say:

"The ultimate stage of activity is inactivity;
the ultimate stage of fighting is no fighting, and
the ultimate stage of music is no music. I shall
expect you again five years from now."

Rhythm man, along with his musicians, leave.

The boys come again and COBURN is invited to the inside of a magnificently clean and spacious training hall. YAMAGUCHI is seen waiting in the center and he is that gardener that was seen earlier outside the house. COBURN takes off his outer jacket and bows to YAMAGUCHI as he gets into his stance. YAMAGUCHI also gets into his ready stance and the two men stand there staring at each other. Both of them bear an expression of wooden look. Sweat begins to flow and the inner struggle begins without any apparent physical movements. No "psychical stoppage" can be secured by either one and they

are like sound and echo merged into one. Suddenly YAMAGUCHI relaxes, smiles and tells him that "The Book" will be delivered to his room if he would wait there. He tells the two boys to show him the way as he retires and picks~~ing~~ up the garden tools, ready to go back to work, as if nothing has happened.

* * * * *

THE FINAL ENCOUNTER:

COBURN reaches the top of the peak several hundred feet away from the blind man who is now still playing the flute. Suddenly AH SAHM stops playing, seemingly sensing someone far away approaching, but resumes again after a brief pause. COBURN comes closer and closer as he reaches his pocket and pulls out several darts. AH SAHM is still playing the flute. COBURN lets out a loud yell as if to warn AH SAHM, then immediately throws several darts at him. Quickly, the blind man wards off one with his flute while ducking the others. The two men are now within ~~several~~ feet away **OF ONE ANOTHER.**

They ~~just~~ stand there, silently facing each other in ready position. All that is heard now is the gentle sound of wind, chirping of birds, etc. etc. Quickly COBURN delivers a few fast strong techniques while AH SAHM counters with his own. They break again and face each other. COBURN is not tense but ready, not thinking but not dreaming, not being set but flexible. In essence, he is being wholly and quietly alive, aware and alert, ready for whatever may come. A contrast from his earlier matches.

There are a few more encounters, but though deadly kicks and blows are being delivered, they are like playing casually with each other and enjoying every moment of it. Most of the time they just stand there with brief economical reaction to each intention of attack or just taking a breath. The two fighters merge into one. The sun is shifting and the blind

man's footwork also shifts until the sun is eclipsed by the blind man's head from COBURN's point of view. Then, all of a sudden, as AH SAHM'S head shifts, a flash covers the full screen, a loud yell fills the air; someone has made his move. With the help of a helicopter the shot pulls upwards very quickly, so that though we are able to see one man fall in defeat, we do not know which man actually fell. The scream also fades as the shot pulls away in distance.

Another shot reveals the peaceful setting of the sun, the wind blowing softly, the birds chirping, and then the sad tune of a flute.

E N D